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TAGS: PINR PGOV PREL AL
SUBJECT: OVERVIEW OF THE ALBANIAN INTELLIGENCE
SERVICES

REF: TIRANA 949

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES STEPHEN A. CRISTINA
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (C) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Albania's intelligence services, the Military Intelligence Service (SHIU) and the Albanian State Intelligence Service (SHISH), have improved their capabilities and are close partners with the USG. During the visit of President Bush, in the support they provide for troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in their close cooperation in the Global War on Terrorism, Albania's intelligence services have demonstrated their capabilities and willingness to assist the USG in any way requested. Despite progress, the intelligence services continue to be hampered by drastic budget shortfalls and some attempts at political manipulation. The USG maintains a close and cooperative relationship with both services who are excellent partners in pursuing US intelligence objectives. END SUMMARY.

The Services

¶2. (S) SHIU: The SHIU is the military intelligence branch that is responsible for battlefield intelligence, analysis, and some basic foreign intelligence gathering. SHIU uses military attaches assigned to Albanian diplomatic missions as its primary foreign intelligence gathering capability, which is therefore limited as the attaches are not trained in specific intelligence gathering functions. The SHIU is not discussed in detail in this cable

because of its limited national-level intelligence role and function.

¶3. (S) SHISH: The SHISH is the descendant of the communist era intelligence service known as the "sigurimi" that was the enforcement tool of the communist regime. The SHISH has adapted well to the post-communist world and has become a professional, largely apolitical intelligence service. The SHISH conducts both domestic and foreign intelligence operations but is focused on the internal threat, primarily related to organized crime, corruption, and the like. SHISH personnel are well trained and are assigned to five branches: Technical Operations, Foreign Intelligence, Counter Espionage, Counter Organized Crime, and Counter Terrorism. Although senior management of the SHISH is generally motivated, the institution as a whole is not highly motivated and has little altruistic or patriotic zeal for its work.

Key Performance Measures

¶4. (S) Organized crime: The SHISH has made excellent progress against organized crime (OC) targets but is hampered by legal constraints, chiefly Albania's broad legal immunity for government officials. The SHISH is aggressive in targeting organized crime suspects, but many times must cease investigations that are tied to officials with immunity. (NOTE: All members of Parliament,

Ministers, Judges (trial, appellate, Constitutional, and Supreme Courts), Central Election Commission members, the People's Advocate, and the Chairman of the High State Control (an independent body) enjoy Constitutional immunity from prosecution for all criminal offenses. END NOTE.) Because of this, there is great incentive for OC figures to obtain positions of power in government. SHISH is limited to information gathering and has no arrest authority. SHISH gathers and passes information on OC and narcotics trafficking to the Albanian State Police for further investigation and arrest.

¶5. (SBU) War Crimes: Albania has no known war criminals, and has assisted in providing information on wanted persons in Serbia and Bosnia when information was available.

¶6. (S) Politicization: The senior ranks of the SHISH understand the need to remain apolitical and in the last few years have fought to maintain professional independence. According to the Albanian Constitution, the Director of SHISH is appointed by the President of the Republic and is independent from the executive branch (the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers). Ensuring the independence of this position has, however, proven difficult. After his election as Prime Minister in 2005, Sali Berisha tried to replace the current SHISH director with a political supporter, which resulted in a lengthy battle between the President, the PM, and the SHISH Director. Direct USG intervention eventually ensured that the Director (Bahri Shaqiri, a highly professional and valuable contact) was allowed to remain. To this date, Berisha has refused to meet with Director Shaqiri, even in the context of official visits of SHISH counterpart personnel.

¶7. (S) Known militants of the governing Democratic Party (DP) with direct ties to the Prime Minister were appointed as the current SHISH Chief of Personnel and in the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The Personnel Chief has orchestrated certain appointments and hirings that do not meet SHISH's

professional development goals, although Director Shaqiri theoretically has the final decision on all hiring. On-going financial cuts, recently drastic in nature, have inhibited SHISH's ability to conduct its work and are perceived by some in the agency as an attempt to influence its behavior. Despite these challenges, there is little evidence that the majority of SHISH personnel have succumbed to specific political influence. The two overt political appointees in SHISH (OIG and Personnel Chief) do not have access to operational information.

¶ 8. (C) The Parliament has a limited role in oversight of the SHISH through the Parliamentary National Security Commission (NSC). There is some public and private discourse in Parliament about increasing this oversight role and establishing some form of intelligence commission, but thus far it has not materialized into any concrete plan. The relationship between SHISH and the current NSC appears to be cordial and cooperative across party lines. Indeed, Albanian politicians outside the executive branch appear to recognize and value the agency's new apolitical and professional performance.

¶ 9. (S) Penetration: The SHISH and SHIU are not known to have any high level penetrations, despite wide public perception among Albanians that the SHISH is

"full" of members of the former communist intelligence service (the "sigurimi") and OC figures. From a USG perspective, there are few individuals that have remained with the organization after the end of the communist period, and those that have are generally capable partners. There are several incidents where investigations on OC have stalled due to unknown circumstances or have not turned up evidence that was suspected, suggesting that there may be some low-level penetration of the SHISH by OC elements, but we are unable to detect any suggestions of this above low levels.

¶ 10. (S) Cooperation with USG: Both SHISH and SHIU are excellent partners with the USG. There is close cooperation on all intelligence activities including OC, Kosovo and other issues of regional stability, and on counterterrorism. As with the GOA across the board, Albanian intelligence services go beyond the normal call of duty to demonstrate loyalty and partnership to the U.S. This was recently demonstrated by the unwavering, all-out cooperation in preparation for the June 10, 2007, visit by President Bush, the first of any sitting U.S. President and an event of a scale Albania had not previously witnessed.

COMMENT

¶ 11. (S) New President Bamir Topi appears to support the current SHISH director fully, which is encouraging. Berisha's recent success in removing the Prosecutor General (reftel) provokes the question whether the PM will renew efforts to remove the SHISH director. Seeing the SHISH retain its apolitical stance is clearly a high priority and a key test of Berisha's intentions, in terms of USG interests. As long as SHISH's growing professionalism is not undermined, we can count on a cooperative partner in international intelligence operations for the foreseeable future. Reinforcement from Washington with high-level GOA contacts of the need for an independent, professional, and adequately funded intelligence service would assist us in maintaining the integrity of this important partner.